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The Aga Khan Award for Architecture

FORM IV
PROJECT RECORD FORM

011.
QAT. D. 31980
316.

I. IDENTIFICATION

1. Project Title QATAR National Museum
2. Postal Address P.O.Box 2777 - DOHA - QATAR

II. PERSONNEL

1. Client/Owner Name/Address Department of Tourism and Antiquities - Ministry of Information P.O.Box 2777 - DOHA - QATAR
2. Planner(s) Address Michael Rice and company Limited
132- 135 sloane street, London SW1 - England
3. Architect(s) Address Design construction group
P.O.Box 3818, Farra building , rue bliss Beirut - Lebanon .
4. Contractor(s) Address Engineering services Department - Ministry of Public works P.O.Box 38 DOHA -QATAR .
5. User/Occupant(s) and Income Level(s) (indicate amount)

	<u>Planned</u>	<u>Actual</u>
User Type	Q.N.M.	Q.N.M.
Income Level	N/A	N/A

III. TYPE OF USE

1. Planned Residence for late sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim AL-Thani
2. Actual QATAR National Museum

IV. PROJECT TIMETABLE (dates)

	<u>Commencement</u>	<u>Completion</u>
1. Project Formulation	Summer , 1972	
2. Project Commission	N/A	
3. Handover to Client	23-6-1975	
4. Opening/Occupancy	23-6-1975	

V. PROJECT ECONOMICS

1. Total Costs (indicate amount) 60,000,000 Ryials equivalent to Ca. 15,000,000 U.S. Dollars
54,000,000 Q.Ri. Materials and Labour 6,000,000 Q.Ri. Professional Fees
2. Major Sources of Funds (give %)
____ Private ____ Municipal 100 % National ____ International

Vll. Project History (contd)

A project committee was established under the Chairmanship of the Director of the Ministry of Information and consisted of Michael Rice and Company, the Consulting Architect, the Ministry of Public Works, and other departmental representatives. The committee met frequently throughout the project reporting to the Minister and from time to time, to the Amir himself, who took a detailed and preceptive interest in the project, throughout all the stages of its development.

The project in its final design form was presented to H. H. the Amir towards the end of 1972. It was immediately approved and work, on the clients' instructions, started on the site within two weeks of the final approval to the plans being received. Construction details and drawings were issued as the initial work proceeded.

1X.2

The site chosen was one of the residences of the Rulers of the State, dating from the time of Shaikh Khalifa's grandfather. The buildings, 10 in all, have been restored accurately (though using contemporary materials), and their rooms are either furnished in the traditional manner or were planned to contain special thematic displays relating to the Museum and the site.

The Qatar Museum consists of four parts:

- the Old Amiri Palace, which is referred to above,
- the Museum of the State, an entirely new building (designed by Anthony Irving FRIBA) which contains the principal archaeological, ethnographical and natural history exhibits, with, as is the case throughout the Museum, extensive use of graphics, audio-visual material and explanatory texts,
- the Marine Museum and Aquarium, a new structure whose function will be evident,
- the Lagoon, on which are moored examples of traditional Gulf craft. These two elements of the Museum symbolise Qatar's relationship with the sea, seafaring and pearl fishing.

The site is thus wholly integrated, not only architecturally, but in the context of the State's history and cultural and social development. The new buildings echo, especially in their design details, the older buildings. They defer to them, but they are not, in any sense, pastiches.

The significance of the site to the Islamic world may be apprehended on several levels. First, the new structures demonstrate that the ideas which informed much traditional Moslem architecture in the management of space, and the use of height, perspectives and the interplay of light, are still valid today and may be used naturally, without resorting to self-conscious imitation. It demonstrates too, the value of integrating traditional buildings of architectural merit or historical importance into new sites, particularly in projects where economy may not be the first or overwhelming consideration.

The Museum also has the merit of showing that public and insitutional buildings need be neither pretentious nor merely grandiose (characteristics not to be associated with Islamic architecture historically).

The impact of the Museum on the local society was very great; the 'society' is identified here rather than the 'economy' because of the peculiar nature of the economics of Qatar, which need hardly be elaborated.

The Museum has acted as a focus for the development of an awareness by Qataris of their nationality, and, particularly amongst the children, of the nature of the society from which they descend and its relationship with the larger society of the Arabian peninsula.

In museological terms, many of the solutions employed in the museum have widespread application. Thus, the extensive use of texts, though surprising to Western visitors at first sight, is wholly assimilable to a society which is as highly verbalised as the Arabic speaking.

The use of graphics and in particular, short loop-film brings a degree of realism and immediacy to the displays.

The landscaping of the site was of particular importance to the planners and the Consulting Architect and the successful growth and maintenance of plants, grasses and trees in the exceptionally inhospitable climate of Qatar is notable.

Fortunately, the main constraints customarily experienced by museum planners - those related to finance - were less evident than usual, in the Qatar project as might be expected in a State with one of the highest per capita incomes in the world. Thus, trouble and effort could be taken to achieve a harmonious and effective ensemble for the complex, and one which was also architecturally impressive. The buildings which had occupied the site and which were to be reconstructed gave much to the eventual character of the complex. Simple and elegantly austere buildings, rooted in an immensely ancient tradition, they provided the inspiration for many of the decorative elements, which are to be seen around the site and in the arcades which front the Museum of the State and the Marine Museum buildings.

An important part of the complex as it was planned was the group of traditional buildings which were to be restored. They were intended to house exhibits and themselves to form part of the Museum's exhibition content. It was decided that, unlike the new Museum of the State another Museum of the Sea buildings, which would contain sensitive materials and displays, the Old Amiri Palace would lose in authenticity if its component buildings were to be air-conditioned. This facility was not extended to them though the subtle ventilation of one of the towers, itself a form of air-cooling, is particularly noted as one of the merits of the Old Palace's original construction.

Architectural Considerations

The new building required a minimum volume in order adequately to serve the Museum of the State displays, together with the minimum needs of the Administrative offices and a small multi-purpose hall for lecturers, exhibitions etc.

Even after separating the Museum of the Sea requirements and locating these above the Aquarium, outside the Old Amiri Palace walls, the minimum volume of building necessary still remained substantially larger than any of the existing Palace structures.

It was a specific request of H.H. the Amir that the main Museum building be "within" or a "part of" the walled area of the old Palace, so an obvious or conventional approach (such as to separate the modern museum completely and join it only by a link with the old Palace) was ruled out.

The visual "suppressing" of the new Museum building was eventually effected by sinking the whole of the structure into the ground - stepping down, therefore, into a partially sunken arcade - then into an entrance at the same level - with the ceiling heights being kept to minimum "oppressiveness" avoided by letting the actual entry lobby rise up into the Mezzanine). The Entrance Lobby then led to the major part of the museum by a staircase to Basement level, but any "underground" feeling is alleviated by allowing windows to look out onto a sunken garden on one side, once Basement level is reached.

The visual 'mass' of the new Museum within the walls is thus brought down to the same scale as the old palace buildings - and the effect is further lightened by the use of an articulated, arched arcade facing into the Museum courtyards.

On the exterior, where minimum fenestration was required, anyway, the special architectural problem (once that of height had been solved) was that of absorbing a long, almost blank, wall into the visual pattern of the existing palace wall (angled, faceted, multiple-levels etc.)

The solution arrived at was the heavy recessing of the exterior wall in an irregular, asymmetric pattern (i.e. to suit the differing interior functions) and carrying these recesses through from lower level, right through the parapets. Heavy shadows effectively break up the Museum mass into something much more compatible with the old palace. Lightly carved gypsum plaster panels are also used in selected areas of the exterior walls executed in the same technique as those in the old palace.

Conclusion

To summarize, the achievement of the Qatar National Museum complex, beyond its evident success as a museum in communicating what it sets out to communicate to the public which uses it, is the reconciliation of a wide diversity of heterogeneous and diverse element with a coherent and harmonious whole. The Museum consists of a group of traditional buildings, two handsome new museum buildings with considerable exhibition potential, administrative offices, a multi-purpose hall, library and research facilities, a marine research facility linked with the aquarium, outdoor cafeteria and shaded seating area, service buildings, garden, open landscapes and a lagoon with an exhibiton of boats. The whole ensemble was conceived and planned integrally; if the planners believe that it has succeeded it is because the most important group for which it caters, the local Qatari population, having known nothing like it before in their experience now use it as a familiar and accepted factor in their lives and as a means of introducing their country to those who visit it.